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SOCIETY FOR THE PROPAGATION OF THE GOSPEL
IN FOREIGN PARTS,
AND THE
CHURCH MISSIONARY SOCIETY.

A SERMON,
PREACHED IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF BISHOP'S HATFIELD,
ON FRIDAY, OCTOBER 26, 1855.

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S E R M O N,

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ACTS xvi. 9.

“And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.”

By such means did God enlighten the minds of His servants who were commissioned to preach the everlasting Gospel to all nations, when, though His will was clearly revealed that all nations should be brought to the obedience of the faith, the way was yet dark and slippery; and in every city bonds and afflictions awaited the messengers of the Most High God, as they made known the way of salvation. Paul, burning with zeal to preach the faith which once he destroyed, yet could not know to which of the dark places of the earth he should direct his steps. There was nothing in the out-

ward aspect of affairs to tell him in which of the thousand cities of the Gentiles God had much people. At the moment when the words of the text bring him before us he was in Mysia, doubting whether he should go into the Greek cities of Asia,—debased with luxury, and deep sunk in idolatrous practices,—or into Bithynia, where a ruder form of superstition offered, it may be, less hindrance to the truth. But both these projects were checked by some sensible manifestation of the will of God. He was “forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia; when he assayed to go into Bithynia, the Spirit suffered him not.” He made, therefore, for the sea coast, straight forward. And at the first seaport town he came to, Troas, when he was still uncertain of his course, the event referred to in the text took place. A vision appeared to Paul in the night. There stood a man of Macedonia, one dressed in the garb of that country, and prayed him, saying, “Come over into Macedonia, and help us.” From this vision he assuredly gathered that the Lord had called him to preach the Gospel there; and set sail with all his company.

Events not wholly dissimilar have at various times marked the progress of the Gospel. But on the whole we are left in these latter days to be guided by the ordinary rules of wisdom and discretion in carrying on this, as all other purposes of Divine goodness in the world. We are left to

recognize different states of mind, different degrees of capability for receiving Divine truth, among the nations of the earth;—different degrees of responsibility resting upon ourselves to make it known here or there, as the case of ignorance and darkness is brought near to us, and the calamitous condition of human nature, left to itself, is laid bare to our view.

You are all doubtless aware that the religious mind of our own nation, exercised on these subjects, has struck out for itself two distinct fields of missionary labour. One field is, that vast number of heathen who dwell in countries subject to our own sovereign, on the ground that it is our duty, as having temporal sway over them, to endeavour to bring them into the way of salvation. Neither are we to reckon in this field the heathen only, but also multitudes of our own countrymen, who have gone over voluntarily, or have been sent over under constraint, to dwell in those regions, for whom, till quite of late years, no adequate spiritual provision was made. This field of missionary labour is occupied by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. The other great field of missionary labour is, in fact, the world at large—wheresoever a missionary can find rest for the sole of his foot, but especially East and West Africa and India. And this object is annually pleaded for in almost every town of this kingdom by the Church Missionary Society.

Now he who would speak of either of these fields

of labour as most important, to the prejudice of the other, would, as it seems to me, hinder as much as he would advance the cause of Jesus Christ. He who would disparage either society to extol the other is not wise. As the dominions of our sovereign are now world-wide, both have, in fact, a world-wide sphere; both would do tenfold what they are doing if their means would allow.

What are their means? The one—the Church Missionary Society—being the more popular, so to speak, of the two, gathers from the pious laity and clergy of England more than 100,000*l.*; the other more than 60,000*l.* A large sum!!! Men said a single ship that was wrecked last year, with provisions of war on board, cost the country twice as much as both these Societies gather in a year for souls, precious souls: yet for that ship and her lading that was lost the country has ordered twenty, fifty times as much to be provided straightway. But these two Societies have no such increase, scarce any increase, rather a decrease. Consider what they have in hand! It is a sad cry which comes from the idol temples of those nations which still lie in darkness and death's awful shadow: and it is a blessed thing when God strengthens the arm of a poor missionary to cause one of those idols to be abolished, and the bloody rites and filthy abominations of that worship to cease. And the records of the Church Missionary Society will tell you that not in one, but in a hundred instances, it has been so done.

But the case of our convict settlers is to my mind more piteous and touching than even this. To think that, when we had purged the land of them for our own peace and safety's sake, and sent them, either for a long term of years or for life, to a distant shore, we at one time wholly neglected their spiritual condition, till there came a voice from over the sea to tell us that in one of our penal settlements a state of moral debasement had grown up, which came up to St. Paul's description of moral debasement before Christ was preached to the Gentiles! To think that we suffered this; we, who boast ourselves in the grace and favour of God, had allowed devilry to triumph among our own sons!

How can we be sufficiently thankful that, so soon as this horror of great wickedness became known, we had, in the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, an instrumentality provided, whereby straightway to combat Satan in his stronghold, and to cast out those unclean spirits who had entered in and taken possession? And who that has any just sense of the mercies which God hath showered upon this favoured land, would withhold his hand from the support of an institution which then laboured, and shall hereafter labour, if like necessity should arise, to take away that reproach from our nation?

Much has been said concerning the withdrawal of the authorized appeal in the Queen's name to the parishes of England in behalf of this Society; but after all, brethren, what can the effect of this with-

drawal be but to stir us up to greater efforts, more self-denial, more careful investigation of the wants we are bound to supply?—that as the sister Society, which stretches forth her arms to the remotest heathen, appeals to the hearts of the people every where and at all times for their free-will offerings, so should this Society cast herself with confidence upon the faith and love of Christ's people?

Does not the cry of our convict settlers—whom ignorance in a great measure and the want of a more tender care made criminals—seem to reach us even now from the utmost parts of the earth, whither we have sent them? “Come over into Australia, and help us.” Do they not justly reproach us,—“We never hear sweet Sabbath chimes; we never have the pleasant Gospel tidings dropping into our ears like balm, children of affliction though we be; we never see the Lord's table spread, nor are exhorted by watchful pastors to put away our sins, and draw near in faith unto that feast of good things which Christ ordained for sinners. We sink into the grave unheeded save by our taskmasters: no wife, no child, no brother, no sister, to moisten our parched lips—to soothe our dying pains. But this we could bear—this we have deserved—this is the just reward of our deeds. But surely we never merited at the hands of our fellow-countrymen to be left in these far-off wilds and desolate heritages without some one accredited minister of Christ's Holy Gospel to stand by us as we enter in the dark

valley of the shadow of death—dark to all, but doubly dark to us—to stand by us, proclaiming peace—peace to them that are far off, and to them that are nigh—peace with God through Jesus Christ?”

Such a cry for help I think it needs no stretch of fancy to imagine from those who were sent from these shores in many degrees of hardness in guilt, yet few so hardened but that a word in season—the Gospel message faithfully delivered to them when they reached the far-off land where their remaining days on earth are to be spent—might have awakened better feelings, have revived the recollections of earlier and better days—of a father’s disregarded warnings, a mother’s unavailing tears.

Or consider the case of those multitudes who go forth year by year as emigrants from these shores; who, by reason that the land is too strait for us and them, separate from us as Lot did from Abraham, for the sake of what is needful for the body, yet are still bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, though between us are the billows of the mighty deep and the steadfast barriers of the everlasting hills. Other lands as rich, as fertile, as beautiful as ours they may find and inhabit; brighter suns may shine upon them; but there is something lacking still. There is an evidence, in most letters I have seen, even from those who are said to be doing well in a new home and among new associations, of a want which, though not always expressed in those words, seems to be connected with the yearnings of the

heart for some help and stay, which neither sunny skies nor abundance of mere bodily livelihood can supply. Oh, my brethren, if you knew what it was to live as some do live, where for all the months in the year, and sometimes for two or three years together, no minister of the Gospel ever lifts up his voice in the wilderness, where the few families that dwell within reach of one another never meet to receive the Lord's Supper for years, where the sacrament of baptism waits to be administered to children, till, perchance, some servant of God passes that way! And then how gladly do the people flock around him, and receive his ministrations! Oh, how joyfully! Inclemency of weather, length of journey, impassable roads, do not hinder them. Let us take care lest our very comforts, and the manifold appliances of life, and the abundance of the ministrations we enjoy, do not prove a millstone hanged about our necks to drag us down into the depth! If you knew what are the privations, the spiritual privations, of many a lone family in foreign parts, you would then understand what is meant by abundance in regard of these things. We know not the value of spiritual privileges, because we never felt the bitterness of being left without them. We never knew what it was to pine for an answer to that question, "What must I do to be saved?" We never knew what it was to ask, in the agony of an almost despairing spirit, "Who shall bring down Christ from above, or who

shall bring up Christ from the dead to save us?" For the word is very nigh unto us, even in our mouth and in our heart, even the word of faith which we preach. Doth any man among us long for a word of comfort in his sickness? Straightway the minister is at hand. Does he long for instruction in the true and saving way? There is one dwelling near who hath no greater joy than to give such instruction to a willing hearer. Is a child born to any? The laver of baptism stands ready, where it is received into the number of the children of God, and heirs of eternal life. Doth a soul long for closer and more intimate communion with God? Not a month passes but the blessed invitation is heard, "Draw near with faith, and take this holy sacrament to your comfort." Is not this abundance? Are not these unspeakable privileges? Then let us who have them endeavour to supply the need of those who have them not.

I have scarce spoken of those vast tribes of the heathen, shut out as yet from all knowledge of purifying and saving truth, whose conversion still lingereth, and our efforts to reclaim them are rather a desultory and irregular warfare than a war of conquest and subversion, so hardly is each post won, and oftentimes lost almost as soon as won.

These are the needs that call us to exertion; this is the work that is to be done in the world; and the main instruments for doing it, as far as concerns us, are those two Societies in whose joint

behalf we are gathered together here this day: and I plead with double joy, and double zeal, because it is in their joint behalf. Though I may have, as probably every one here has, a stronger leaning towards the one or the other, yet I am deeply convinced that, until they work hand in hand, and side by side, at home,—as it is said that those whom they send forth are found doing continually abroad,—much of the good they both would desire to effect is lost and frittered away. Suffer me to point out one obvious effect of their antagonism. It causes at once their good to be evil-spoken of. It affords a handle, a just handle, to the gainsayers, to speak reproachfully. It estranges from us many who, if they saw us united in this noble effort, would be constrained to come in and help us. Remember there is one who quickens the perception of weak or world-loving men to see defects in holy things, and to make those defects their excuse for standing apart from the work. And it is not what we lose by their standing apart, but what they lose, that is to be much thought of. We all know the benefit to the individual of an interest, however slight at first, in missions and such holy works. We have all seen men become serious, earnest, thoughtful, active, and energetic for good; and at length more deeply impressed with all religious truth, through their being brought in contact continually with those whom God hath raised up in the world to be the effectual and earnest promoters of these things.

Now the first impulse never comes to many; they are turned away at the very beginning: when the Lord was just about to open their hearts that they should attend to the things spoken by such men, he who is ever on the watch to frustrate good suggested to them secretly that very objection which we are told turned aside a learned heathen from the truth: "Have nothing to do with these men, they are not agreed among themselves; the promoters of one of these Societies are rancorous (so they speak) against the others. It will be time for you to join yourself to their company when they are at one among themselves." Have you never been struck, brethren, at the wonderful shrewdness of men to take advantage of these weaknesses of ours? Have you never been able to trace up to some such cause the coldness of support we receive from some, who are far from being indisposed to religious service where their convictions are established, and their feelings interested? If you desire a proof of this, which no man can gainsay, consider only how the disputes about matters, which are truly secondary and of least importance in our great Educational Societies, have thwarted the whole work, soured the whole nation, as I may say, and been an effectual engine in the hand of the adversary to throw back by some years, God grant it be not by a decade or decades of years! that day which one of our kings desired to see, when every cottager in his dominions should be able to read his Bible.

Therefore, dear brethren, I have always felt, that so long as the jealousy or rivalry between these two great Missionary Societies has been at such a pitch, that a zealous promoter of the one should openly say in a large assembly,—“We are not for joint meetings, joint collections: it damps the zeal of our supporters, that what they are ready and willing to give should be divided with another missionary society, however good and excellent the work of that society may be,”—when I heard these words, I felt that neither yet were we children in malice, nor men in understanding, as St. Paul bade us to be; that there was a narrow-mindedness in this, as well as a want of right and open-heartedness; till which was overcome we should have to be content with small measures of success in the Gospel, and pitiful accessions to our resources, and that which I can but consider to be a mark of some great defect in our state, large and frequent testamentary legacies, as compared with gifts and sacrifices made in the lifetime of the giver, to the greatest cause on the face of the earth,—the preaching of the Gospel to all nations.

I hope if any of you are otherwise minded, you will suffer these considerations to weigh with you for your brethren and companions' sake. I hope in this place you will not decline this fresh call upon you, as faithful and attached members of the Church of England, to help her devoted bishops, priests, and deacons contending with untold difficul-

ties, in India, in Africa, in Canada, in Australia, and the islands of the sea,—I hope without diminishing aught of what you have given to that Society in whose operations you have now for many years, as I judge by your gifts, taken a warm and affectionate interest. [Truly, brethren, our efforts in behalf of missions at best do not admit of diminution. If the laity of England took up the cause, as I think they might be induced to take it up, if certain hindrances were removed out of their way, it would soon be seen of how much increase they were capable.] I hope, therefore, that without diminishing by one single penny your gifts to that Society which is to you as an old and familiar friend, you will allow the claims of another—remembering that the ministers and messengers accredited by the one do often and fervently fulfil the part of fellow-helpers to their brethren sent by the other, when they chance to labour in the same region. Let the thoughts of what is being thus done in New Zealand and Tinnevelly inspire you with a confident hope of God's blessing upon united efforts and consent in prayer. Bear in mind how strongly prophets and apostles ever warned God's people against division in every time and place—how this has been the bane of all good works, from the days when it so interrupted and hindered St. Paul's work at Corinth even to the present—when, because of it, both this work in which we are now engaged, and that to which I referred just now, the

education of the people, and another work, the necessity for which becomes more apparent day by day, the restoration of a godly discipline—when, I say, all these great works do languish, and every honest effort to forward them is thwarted, because of divisions, because we are so seldom truly and indeed “with one accord in one place,” as the first believers were; always some bitter root springing up and troubling us—always some or other event occurring to remind us that we are as Israel was when Osee testified against her, “Their heart is divided: now shall they be found faulty.” Oh! let it be so no more, brethren; especially let it not be so in the work in which we are engaged to-day. May the spirit of love and unity prevail amongst us! May no word be uttered, no sentiment conceived, which shall injure the great cause we all have at heart, which is to spread the knowledge of our crucified and risen Lord to the farthest corners of the earth!

THE END.







